

Minnesota Department of Public Safety State Fire Marshal Division

Toys and Tools: A Lesson for Children

It is important to teach children that lighters and matches are tools and not toys.

Here is a simple idea to help teach that lesson. Find or make two boxes: one for toys and one for tools. Gather the props, tools and toys from a second-hand store. Include various matches and lighters for the toolbox and a novelty lighter. A smoke alarm and small hand tools can also go into the toolbox.



The items in the boxes carry many talking points covered in the following lesson plan.

Lesson plan

Administration details

- This activity can be done in conjunction with station tours, in classroom settings or open houses.
- Research age-appropriate messages for your target age range.

What to bring

- A toy box and toolbox full of toys and tools
- If parents will attend, consider bringing appropriate handouts to give them (safe-escape planning, smoke alarm/CO alarm placement and maintenance, etc.).

Set up

- Display the tools and toys on a table or the floor
- Make sure the children do not touch any of the items; rather, the presenter should hold up each item, one at a time, and ask the audience to declare "Toy!" or "Tool!"



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Talking points

- Ask the children to help you determine in which box the items belong.
- Tools are for grown-ups to use.
- Lighters and matches are tools, not toys.
 - If you find lighters or matches, leave them alone and tell a grown-up.
- Only play with things that you know are toys.
- Thumb ball
 - Write various words or phrases on a small beach ball with a marker
 - Smoke alarm
 - Escape plan
 - Tools
 - Toys
 - Lighter
 - Matches
 - Whatever other messages you might use
 - Throw the ball to the students; wherever their thumb is, have them tell you something about that word.
- If time permits, the presenter could use flip-cards to play “Hot! Not Hot!” with the kids.

To address with parents or caregivers:

- Test smoke and carbon monoxide alarms every month.
- Change smoke and carbon monoxide alarm batteries at least once a year.
- Replace smoke alarms – even hard-wired ones -- every 10 years.
- What to do (and what to coach their children to do) when the smoke alarm sounds.
- Plan and practice safe-escape.
- Safe (i.e., battery-powered) candles.

